



## **Inquiry Learning Definition**

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The Inquiry Learning model takes advantage of students' natural curiosity. It requires well-developed questioning skills. It helps students to develop strategies and processes for collecting and evaluating information (information literacy).

Students immerse themselves in the topic, context, or situation they are studying. They investigate the location, historical background, current situation, and problems. They become mini-experts on the topic (Knowledge Attack) before beginning the inquiry process (Inquiry Learning Model).

In this inquiry process students form a question that becomes the focus of their investigation. They form subsidiary questions, form hypotheses, plan and carry out their research, come to some conclusions, and decide how they could make change happen.

## **Inquiry Learning Model**

### **Knowledge Attack**

The students spend approximately 2 weeks immersing themselves in a topic in order to become something of an expert on a particular subject. During this time the students will cover selected achievement objectives from the New Zealand curriculum.

### **Essential question**

Students form the essential question (a high level question, based on Bloom's Taxonomy) that becomes the basis of the inquiry. The question should be relevant to the students' lives either now or in the future. It can relate to global issues. It should be a question that does not have an obvious answer. Students will need to research information and think critically about the issue in order to form an answer. The quality of this question is paramount to the quality of the inquiry.

### **Subsidiary questions**

Students work collaboratively to write subsidiary questions that will help them answer the essential question. Powerful subsidiary questions are "telling questions" (McKenzie, 2000). They help keep students focused on the main question. Display these questions on a large wall chart.

### **Hypothesise**

Students work in small groups or pairs to form hypotheses for the subsidiary

questions before they do their research. Hypotheses are recorded under the questions on the wall charts.

Post-it notes of one colour can be used to record these answers on the wall chart. Later, post-it notes of a different colour can be used for their researched answers. This method of recording answers helps to give the teacher a way of measuring what the students have learned.

### **Gathering information (research)**

Students work in groups on one or more of the subsidiary questions. Suitable resources in terms of accessibility, up-to-date information, readability, and quality are selected. Examples of resources are people in the community, email, books, the Internet and videos. The teacher could also recommend appropriate websites.

Students need to have been taught information literacy skills that will help them access and recognise relevant information. For example, if students are using the Internet they will need to understand how to:

- use search engines,
- use keywords and topic sentences,
- highlight relevant information and download it into a file
- record information found on post-it notes, and put on charts under the subsidiary questions and the hypotheses.

### **Sifting and sorting**

Groups or individual students sort the answers to their subsidiary questions. During this time students make collaborative decisions about the information they have collected. They eliminate and re-arrange information into categories or under questions. They check hypotheses charts for information that may have been added by others.

### **Synthesise**

Students examine their subsidiary question again. They can use a mind map to help them organise their information to form an answer. The group may review their answer several times before finalising it.

### **Report**

Students review their work to see that all relevant information is included in their answer. They discuss how they will present their answer to the subsidiary question and report back to the class.

Some suggested presentation methods are:

tapes  
PowerPoint or KidPix slideshow

video  
ideas maps  
OHP

### **Answering the essential question**

Students now look at the essential question in the light of the collated new knowledge. Students think critically about a solution or new insight, and about action they may be able to take. They justify their answers. Students need to recognise that there is no one correct answer – rather new ideas or solutions. They explore ways of raising awareness. For example:

- write to the appropriate MP or consulate,
- a letter to the editor,
- make signs or advertisements to put around the district,
- change their own behaviour to influence others around them.

### **References**

McKenzie, J. 1999. *Beyond Technology: Questioning, Research and the Information Literate School*. Bellingham, WA: FNO Press.

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